

WICKERSHAM PARK
502 Fourth Street
Petaluma
Sonoma County
California

HALS CA-52
CA-52

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY
PACIFIC WEST REGIONAL OFFICE
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1111 Jackson Street, Suite 700
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HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY

WICKERSHAM PARK

HALS NO. CA-52

Location: 502 Fourth Street, Petaluma, Sonoma County, CA
Lat: 38.2303 Long: -122.6334

Significance: Wickersham Park was an early park in the town of Petaluma, CA and appears to meet National Register Criteria A and C. It is significant in the categories of social history, landscape architecture, recreation, and in community planning and development. It is also associated with early citizens of Petaluma, including Mrs. Thomas Maclay, formerly Miss Elizabeth Wickersham, and the locally important nurseryman and landscape designer J. Wallace Mann.

History: On Feb. 5 1932 paper announced that Mrs. Thomas Maclay, formerly Miss Elizabeth Wickersham, left the block of land to the city for a park, along with a donation of fifteen thousand dollars. (Mr. Maclay later left an additional \$10,000.) The gift of the land was valued at \$65,000. The land had been sought for building projects for many years, but Mr. And Mrs. Wickersham had been content to use the lot to graze their milk cow. After the cow was stabled for the evening they allowed children to use the fenced block as a ballpark. It was Mrs. Maclay's wish that the city use the land for a park that would resemble a garden to commemorate her parents and the garden of her childhood. Her father, I.G. Wickersham, had come to Petaluma after a disappointing experience in the gold rush, and opened the town's first bank. Mrs. Wickersham had a formal garden and many roses at her D Street home, so Elizabeth stipulated that the park contain roses and benches.

Within a few years the park was under construction, having been designed by local landscape gardener and nurseryman J. Wallace Mann. The Works Progress Administration allocated \$4,425.00 towards the expected \$13,995 costs. A pump house and restrooms were included. "Electroliers" – or electric lights- were also included and must have been a novelty for a park at the time as this fact was prominently mentioned in the local newspapers. Early photos of the park include several shrubs and flower beds; other than roses there are few shrubs and flowers in the park now.

At the same time as the park was being built, there was a national and local movement to provide playgrounds in the parks. The Promote Petaluma Playgrounds committee may have requested a playground at Wickersham; the local newspaper stated that there would be no playground, despite rumors. In this era, parks generally contained recreational areas, but this park, as a commemorative park envisioned by the donor, does not fit the expected mold and the park's style appears to predate earlier parks. By 1948 the Argus Courier's editor was promoting a new band shell for the park, along with play area. The proposal caused enormous controversy, with those who recalled Mrs. Wickersham's stipulations crying foul. In the 1970s a group of elderly Italian men were granted permission to install a bocce court in the park. In 1984 the court fell into disuse and was removed. The same year the restrooms were removed, deemed too expensive and decayed to retain.

Volunteers from the Petaluma Garden Club have maintained the roses for several years, planting new roses and pruning the roses annually. A small amount of money is still generated from the trust fund, and is used towards maintenance of the park.

Description: One of the quietest parks in town, Wickersham Park has changed little since its inception. The park, at 2.17 acres, covers a town block and is located in four blocks south of downtown in a residential neighborhood. The park is entered from the corners of the lots; the softly curving paths meet in the center of the park around an oval planting bed. The park features several large trees of twenty-one different species. Scattered through the park are seventeen white painted wood trellises with green benches underneath. The trellises are surrounded by roses. On the southern edge of the park is a small stucco structure used for storage. Lawn covers the non-path areas.

Sources: "City accepts WPA Grant for Wickersham Park; Council Approves Project Plans." Petaluma Argus Courier, August 18, 1938.

"Director Thayer Recommends Dropping Plans For Changes At Wickersham Park." Petaluma Argus Courier, May 26, 1948.

"Entrance View Of New Park." Petaluma Argus Courier, 1939.

"Magnificent Block of Land Bequeathed To Petaluma By Mrs. Thomas Maclay." Petaluma Argus-Courier, Feb. 5, 1932.

Olmsted, Dunchan H, "Wickersham Park." (Editorial), Petaluma Argus Courier, may 20, 1948.

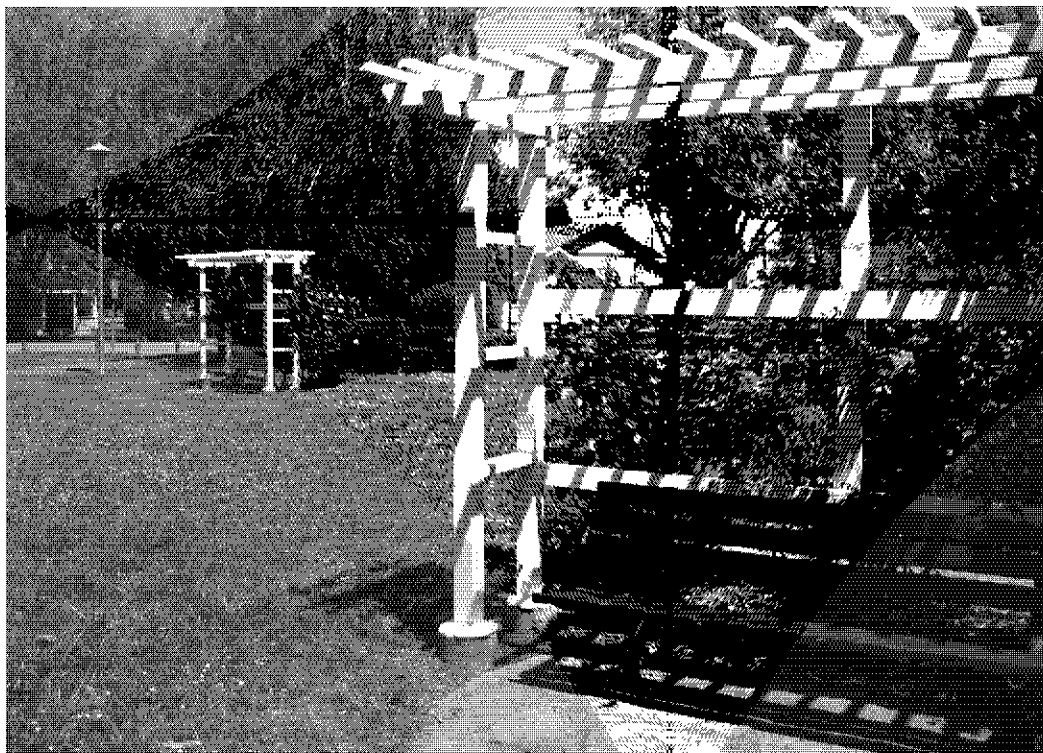
"Resolution No. 4092" E. W. Maclay bequest and acceptance by City Council, May 2, 1932.

"Petaluma's Newly Acquired Park." Petaluma Argus Courier, 1939.

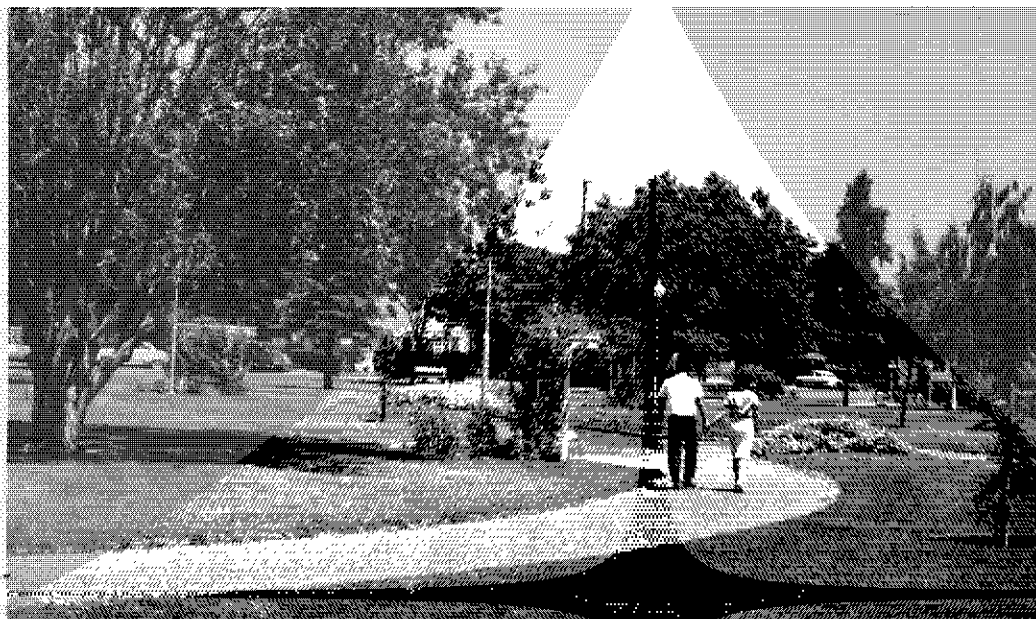
"The Day Was Friday." newspaper clipping, publication name missing, July 31, 1936.

"Wickersham Park Coming Up Roses 50 Years Later." Press Democrat, October 8, 1989.

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One of the seventeen wood trellises located in Wickersham Park (Janet Gracyk, May 13, 2008).



An undated historic image shows most trees still at an early age (Petaluma Historical Library and Museum, used with permission).